

It feels like enough

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Summary: In a world where people can see colors only after having met their soulmates, Arthur and Francis are destined to be together. They don't fall in love at first sight, but things slowly improve. Things go well, until Arthur starts losing his eyesight.

[Soulmate!AU][Human!Fruk]

It feels like enough

**\*\*It feels like enough\*\***

There are two types of tea in the box that Arthur keeps in the kitchen: black tea and white tea. In the same way black cups and white cups are carefully piled in the cupboard, next to candid saucers and dark saucers, in a kitchen where the floor is grey and the wall cream-coloured.

At least, this is like Arthur sees it, because for his mother, who has been happily married for thirty years, the table is cherry-coloured, the floor apple-green and the wall yellow.

The mass of never-ending greyness that Arthur calls sky for her is blue, like the sea, while the lawn â€" a charcoal grey land â€" shines green. Whatever that means. Born in a world without colours, for him that names have no sense, because he has nothing to compare them to.

The first time Arthur stops seeing in black and white, he is carefully dividing strawberries from bananas, that he loathes, in the watery fruit salad from the firm's canteen.

Eating isn't always easy when you can't see colours. Jellybeans, for example, are like a roulette and, although people develop the ability to distinguish grey from grey with time, the risk of picking up the only hated taste persists. Arthur loves lemon-flavoured jellybeans, as much as he hates orange-flavoured ones; the only solution is to submit the packet to someone whose world is already coloured. Arthur

does this too, even at the dawn of his twenty years.

Luckily, strawberries and bananas are different without the help of colours, the young man thinks, while he piles with care the candid small wheels on the plate. If the canteen food is slightly edible, because the cook always cooks it much longer than necessary, bananas are taboo. Just thinking about them, Arthur feels nauseous.

He is so busy in this task that when someone asks him if the empty seats of his table are free, he shakes his head to say "no", absentmindedly, without having really understood the question; when he raises his eyes, whoever has interrupted his meal is already gone. From that moment few seconds are enough to change everything.

Red is the first colour Arthur experiments and years of stories are not enough, however detailed, to prepare him to this discovery. The last piece of strawberry, still put on the point of the small plastic fork, suddenly is dyed vermillion; it vibrates with arrogance under his nose, with such a beauty that Arthur's eyes are filled with tears. It is just a stupid, so stupid, piece of strawberry, but it is also the first fragment of a new, bright world; it is the signal something big is about to happen. In short, it is too important to be eaten.

With the canteen changing, undressing from the veil of greyness wore until then, Arthur orders himself to remain calm, to breathe deeply to prevent his heart - in panic - spurts from his chest. It beats so loudly that he doesn't even have to pose a hand on the breastbone to hear it.

It is something they teach to everyone from early childhood: in his world colours are reserved to those who have met their soulmates. Normally the majority of population finds its own half in its twenties, sometimes by chance, more often thanks to gatherings the various countries organize so that soulmates born in different nations can meet.

Someone, on the contrary, falls in love as a child, during kindergarten, for a handshake or a small kiss on the cheek. Others pass their whole existence in a vain research because the person destined to them will never cross their path; there are also cases of people who decide to ignore certain details and to be happy with someone who, albeit madly in love, will never be the perfect companion.

A soulmate doesn't care for sex, age, race, religion: this is why society is so open.

Arthur sounds out the room looking for someone acting in a similar way as his. He skips a balding man with a wedding ring. He ignores the small girl with the face almost inserted in the salad bowl. He lingers on the woman reading the newspaper on the sport page for a few seconds. Finally his radar rings and Arthur fixes his sight on a man slightly older than him, who is chatting with a couple of friends.

It's him, no doubt. In his eyes of "Arthur-still-does-not-know-which-colour", not having a comparison term, he recognizes his very own surprise. He is near enough to capture fragment of conversation and, even if it wasn't like that,

the gestures suffice to explain the situation.

"Are you sure these are violet?" the man asks. The voice belongs to the person who has talked to Arthur some moment ago. Arthur peers from above the glass half-full with orange juice, while at the other table people discuss about a plate of carrots.

"Yes, yes, violet" a second man assures, passing a hand in his brown tufts, though the voice is already trembling from a laugh hardly held back. "Come on, Francis, you want to be a stylist and you don't even know carrots are violet" he mocks him. The other frowns and Arthur can almost see the metaphoric small wheels that turn wildly in his brain, trying to understand if his friends are saying the truth or they have made him the target of a new joke.

"Don't look at me!"

A third man with almost white hair raises his hand to sign he doesn't want to be involved in the matter. However, after some time he adds: "For Lindz carrots are orange, but I wouldn't trust her so much."

>"Are you still angry for what has happened?"<p>

"Absolutely no. She can keep her very boring soulmate, with whom colours are wasted. I mean, piano keys are already black and white!"

The sudden entrance of a group of girls chatting too loudly and moving like a single being prevents Arthur to hear further. When silence returns, the three men are discussing on whom among the present people may be Francis' soulmate. One by one they point at someone and comment; it is enough for Arthur to divert his gaze to hide his turmoil, while a new sentiment makes his hands shaking: anger. No, loathing.

"I hope it isn't him. I mean, has he dressed in the darkness?"

Arthur doesn't know what is so bad in wearing purple-coloured trousers and a saffron-coloured gilet, as far as the targets sewed inside the clothes are concerned. Personally he thinks it is a great match, now that he can verify with eyes what his mother has always told him in words.

"Because your sweater is beautiful" he bursts out, with a too loud voice.

Perfect. Now his brain can formulate a single order: get out before becoming a laughing stock. Soulmates are nonsense. To believe to be destined to someone from birth, to a single, exclusive person in the whole world is a foolishness in comparison to which the fairies he met as a child are as real as a scientific experiment. A bitter taste spreads in his mouth, while he gathers his belongings and, with no further delay he gets up, the border of the trail pressing against the stomach.

"Yes, it would be terrible. Opsâ€¦!"

The man with light hair, Gilbert, stretches out a leg with false nonchalance just where Arthur is passing. Arthur cannot avoid to

trip. The trail squirts from his hands, the plate does a couple of flips in the air before crashing on the linoleum, his face makes an unpleasant acquaintance with the floor. The three friends laugh, causing murderous instincts in him.

"Gilbert!"

>"It was an accident!"<p>

"Are you ok?"

Arthur mutters an indistinct reply, face buried in his crossed arms. He is still lying down, with all the intentions of staying like this until his humiliation will wane. Or until someone will be in the canteen, the concept is the same. He doesn't remember to have bought a ticket to "embarrassment-town".

"For me he's dead."

"Better, no?"

"Don't listen to them."

Arthur hears Francis giving his friends some tasks to send them away, then he doesn't offer him the hand to help him to get up, but he does something Arthur appreciates more. He sits down next to him. Without a sign of wanting to pull him from the floor, he just waits, speaking like there is nothing strange.

"After all it's a day to remember" he finishes his passionate speech about soulmates, love, and other similar mawkishness Arthur has found only in the romance novels he reads secretly from everyone, to preserve the façade of being a cynic person he has built with such a care.

"Yeah, two strangers meet and magically they live happily ever after. I didn't remember I was in a fairy tale" he replies, now sat. The sarcasm is palpable.

Francis bursts into a new laugh, but this time it is sincere, different from the previous one.

"Your gestures contradict your words. There is no reason to rush. Personally I have always found fascinating a love that develops slowly. Francis Bonnefoy, intern, marketing department."

He offers a hand that Arthur clasps dubiously. Francis' handshake, however, is sure.

"Arthur Kirkland, human resources."

He turns quickly to hid a half smile.

To have found your own supposed soulmate isn't something you can keep hidden for long and, despite the efforts to pretend nothing has changed, even Arthur can't

conceal it. For his mother, who has taken a single day to find out, Arthur has a new sparkle in the pupils.

Even in office colleagues don't miss making their comments. It is the

rose sloping on the computer keyboard to cause the major gossip, especially if the same gesture has been repeating since the previous Monday. Arthur shrugs, while he glides the stem of the flower between his fingers, ignoring the few thorns. He buries his nose in the pink corolla with ears aimed at capturing the arrival of someone who may surprise him in a similar moment of vulnerability. When you grow up with four brothers all inclined in making you see all sort, you quickly learn to defend yourself from the world.

It would be a mistake to believe Arthur hasn't still abandoned his own innate loathing for Francis, for his strange accent, the companies he frequents, the excessive expansiveness, the eroticism that accompanies him wherever he goes, and a series of small, petty details. Actually, Arthur doesn't lose the opportunity to insult him, with his subtle irony.

This doesn't prevent him from accepting an invite to dinner. At least, he can use the excuse to free food, he repeats to himself, inspecting his clothes with an attention that is excessive for such a flaunted disinterest.

After almost an hour, he ends up opting for something formal, with a very hazardous colour match, sufficient to cause in Francis the expression of wanting to facepalm himself. Tightening the tie, Arthur smirks towards his reflection: Francis adores criticizing his fashion choices.

In truth, their first appointment isn't a real dinner, more a drinking evening in a pub. For being a pub, the place is strangely cozy and clean.

They sit at the bar, next to each other, with glasses cumulating in front of them, especially on Arthur's side. Like this, they speak without looking in each other's face, but for a start it is enough.

The problem is that Arthur can't hold his liquor at all and few glasses are sufficient for his tongue to declare itself independent from the brain and to start diffusing compromising information.

"Wait, wait. Are you saying you never had a girlfriend? Or a boyfriend?" Francis interrupts him. He seems absolutely lucid. Arthur can't decide whether the other is more surprised or more scandalized.

"It seems obvious" he replies, hardly, in a drowsy voice and with a little intolerance for having to explain something so evident.

To discover that Francis has been "retroactively unfaithful", as Arthur calls it, relights his visceral loathing for the other, expresses in less and less coherent mumbles, because he is angry for what he considers cheating and because Francis doesn't seem to understand how serious the situation is.

Arthur spends the entire week avoiding him. This, however, doesn't prevent Francis from courting him with the daily rose, that " Arthur still doesn't know how " he manages to leave in the pencil box on his desk. It is a white rose, accompanied for the first time by a card written in Francis small and elegant handwriting.

"This is you."

"A white rose, a heart that doesn't know love."

The second time they go dining together, things go better.

Francis has the ability to attract gazes like a magnet does with iron and Arthur makes no exception, even if he always has an explanation ready to justify himself when he is caught. Also this time, he pretends to be lost in his own thoughts, while he follows the movements of a fly that buzzing continues to hit the chandelier, unable to avoid the deathly fascination of the neon. In reality Arthur is occupied in studying the other. Numerous things about Francis are still unknown to him and he finds himself wanting to know more, with a piece of salad suspended few inches from his mouth, which for now doesn't seem inclined to eat the bite.

"Did you lose your appetite?" Francis asks, completely at ease. He hasn't chosen the restaurant by chance, Arthur has understood it from the friendly way he interacts with waiters and waitresses, although he has the feeling things wouldn't have changed much even if they went in a place unknown to both.

Francis has his arms posed on the seatback of the chair, the body relaxed without being messy, the head a little inclined backwardly, enough to show the neckline, interrupted by his Adam's apple, going up and down for every bite of food ingested. The chin is covered with a little blonde stubble.

When he orders the dessert and flirts with the waitress, with such a sureness and levity it becomes hard to understand if he is joking or not, Arthur knows the sting of jealousy.

"Don't make that face."

Francis pushes toward him a small plate with half portion of millefeuille cake, too inviting for Arthur to sustain the comedy of being offended for a long time. Or, he is offended enough to pout, but not to renounce to the dessert.

"Don't look at me! Haven't they taught you it is rude?" he complains, pretending to not having being the first to act in the very same way.

For answer, Francis poses his cheek on the knuckles and smiles, with an expression Arthur doesn't hesitate in labelling as "stupid".

"You are beautiful," Francis answers simply and it is clear he really thinks it. He isn't pretending a compliment just for courtesy sake. It isn't a compliment used as a mask for second purposes, but a simply authentication of reality: for him Arthur is beautiful, even with those dark caterpillars he has as eyebrows. This, however, he doesn't add.

"Even if your face is all covered in crumbs!"

>Arthur quickly clean his lips with the napkin spread on the knees.<p>

"Better?"

"Almost."

It takes him by surprise when Francis stands up and, leaning above the table, dangerously near the glasses still containing some wine, bends toward him. He kisses him on the corner of the mouth.

"There was a crumb left."

It is only a stamp kiss, a joke, but Arthur blushes and a tremor traverses his body, staying with him all the way home.

Other two months pass before their very first kiss. It's surely the first for Arthur. It's the most important of a long series for Francis. There is a scorching sun, in a mid-July afternoon, when staying in office becomes a slow torture. Fans are going at full speed; jacket and tie have been abandoned for days in favour of more casual clothes, in a tacit agreement between managers and employees. However similar measures are barely sufficient to avoid dripping continuously with sweat.

"I think I will go crazy!" Francis complains, moving away a tuft of air from sticky brow.

"Do you have an elastic band?" he adds. Arthur gives him the one he uses to keep his yellow document folder closed.

"Why don't you just cut them?"

>"Are you kidding?"<p>

Francis pretends to have heard an injury, while he finishes tying his hair in a small ponytail with hands behind his nape. "Don't even say that! I don't want to look like a hedgehog like you!"

A wavy tuft continues to escape the constriction, too short to be held; it slides down the line of the jawbone. It flutters as Francis' head moves, in a hypnotic, almost inviting manner, until Arthur stretches out a hand to hold it in the fist, joking and menacing at the same time. After all, he has imagined several times to tear off that slightly feminine hair.

For Francis it is like an occasion served on the proverbial silver trail. He doesn't hesitate to block Arthur with a cup hand behind Arthur's nape, forcing him to incline the head to prevent their noses to collide when he forces his lips in an unexpected but finally not refused kiss. After a first moment of surprise, Arthur fiercely answers opening his mouth is a languid gesture, that is extremely exciting in its inexperience. It is a kiss tasting salty like the sweat dropping on their visages, while the space between the bodies becomes inexistent and the barrier of clothes, suddenly, appears too annoying.

The next Saturday they make love, then again the following one, all day, oblivious of any other stimulus, with a bond that they can't categorize in a single feeling. They are not just lovers, they are soulmates and it is something inexplicable.

Three months later they consider themselves a couple. After a year they start living together, then they marry and things go well, too well.

"What did the ophthalmologist say?" Francis enquires, with morning newspaper open on the knees. The sincerely worried voice makes Arthur feel guilty; the thin golden band on his ring finger is a sign of how many things have changed in the latest years.

"I need to rest my eyesight."

Arthur counts two months on his fingers. In barely a couple of months his eyesight has worsen at a worrying speed, with dioptries disappearing like popcorn in a movie theatre. It isn't just the precocious long-sightedness, that forces him to hold a book half metre from the face if he wants to see the letter, or the first signs of astigmatism, but the spot of mist that dances in front of the eyes with increasing frequency, impossible to be forecasted. Other times, it is a dark line that cuts the landscape for long, entire, painful minutes.

The truth is that Arthur is terrified from what is happening to him.

The doctors, not being able to understand the cause, just mention possible, also inexplicable, damages to the optical nerve, blaming bad luck when it isn't possible to find another culprit.

Francis tries to console him, but the number of visited specialists increases, the bank account empties, and still not a single clear answer has been given.

He is not only " or most " afraid of blindness in itself, but of the limitations it will force on him. Like the driving license, recalled after he has almost hit a group of children crossing the road

"I haven't see the traffic light" he justifies through the bathroom door, with horror for the so close tragedy still painted on his face. He has a bottle of bad gin held between his knees, from which he directly drinks, not caring that it will make him feel even worse, with tears dunking the collar of his shirt.

When Francis advises him to speak to a support group that may help him in not considering the whole situation as a complete disaster, Arthur explodes. He shouts, he accuses Francis of superficiality, he throws on him all the mistakes made during, and before, their living together, using old episodes already solved to give new nourishment to the frustration that infects his soul, until he doesn't even know anymore the reason behind the cruelties pronounced.

He yells until he forces Francis to leave the room and to go in the walkway, where Arthur knows he will walk go and forth waiting for him to calm down or to fall asleep. Then Arthur shouts because Francis left.

"See, I was right!"

He lazes in his own victim complex, using any occasion to nourish it.

Surely the phantom on the impeding blindness has caused him to change several habits. Coffee, for example. Arthur fiercely hates that



beverage, to the point of not being even able to stand the smell without feeling nauseous. Still he knocks back an increasing number of cups, like it was a medicine.

The doctors haven't been able to precisely tell him the day he will completely lose his eyesight, waving from one year and never, making Arthur develop the fear of the night, of the sleep, of waking one day in darkness.

The bluish eye circles marking his cheekbones make him looking older than his twenty-five years. Arthur arrives to the point of sleeping only a couple of hours per night and not even all the nights.

At first, Francis jokes about the situation, he prepares himself the coffee with the usual five spoons of sugar, he does all his best to keepiArthur awake, for taking advantage of the night for his favourite type of exercise.

Too bad, Arthur is so nervous, with coffee only worsening the problem, that he gives himself more and more rarely, rolling into a ball of thorns on his side of the bed, almost on the edge, with knees against the chest and arms closing the knot, wrapped up in the two sizes bigger T-shirt he uses as pyjamas.

These are the moments when his childish and capricious side emerges. The rare times he accepts to make love, the action inevitably transforms into pure sex, quick and violent. To be precise, Arthur is by now the one who establishes when and how, in a totally arbitrary way, deprived from any sweetness. Francis, who also loves to experiment, to play, and for whom sex is never for its own sake, would lie if he said he is having fun, unsure in deciding which version of his companion is worse, whether the hysteric or the horny. Above all, it is not nice to fuck a soulless body. It isn't Arthur the man growling under " sometimes on " him, it isn't the man he knows. It isn't even present.

Arthur doesn't lose just his eyesight. Not only the light disappears from his green, obfuscated irises, but also the joy for life, or even the simple wish to exist. He arrives to threaten to do some madness if left alone. He resigns. He lazily learns braille.

"See what happens?"

Arthur can't see Francis' face since the latest weeks, but his voice tone is enough to guess his mood. Sat on the edge of the bathtub, Arthur perceives his preoccupation, his exasperation. He feels commiserated and hates Francis for this, then he hates himself for being so ungrateful, in a vicious circle he can't escape.

He shrugs, muttering something about not wanting to depend on others; then he stretches out his hands with palms up, on which there is a bad reddish burn. If even at the beginning Francis has half-banished him from the kitchen after Arthur has succeeded in the not easy challenge of making the microwave oven explode at first use, now the room is for him forbidden land. Arthur doesn't lose occasion to ignore the ban.

"Anyway, what did you want to prepare?" Francis asks, before warning him that, after piercing all the blisters, he is about to use oxygen water and damn that thing burns. "Not those small flat breads you

love so much, I hope."

More than small flat breads they are pieces of carcinogenic charcoal.

"Tea."

Tea, his favourite beverage, that only he can prepare as he likes, with the right infusion time, the right temperature, the right amount of milk. Francis always does something wrong " or, maybe, Arthur has just decided so for a matter of principle " and Arthur hasn't drank a decent cup of tea in weeks. He would be on the verge of a withdrawal symptom for tea if that were even possible. Francis finishes to disinfect his hands.

"I don't think you need a bandage."

"Promise me you won't die before me" Arthur suddenly whispers, not caring that the situation may not be the best or that his request is absurd. He repeats it, one, two, three times, showing that fragile side only Francis knows. The answer, unsure, takes too much time to arrive.

"It isn't something I can control, Arthur."

"Promise!".

In their world, colours disappear when your soulmate dies, so that the painful news arrives immediately, without mediators; but Arthur has lost even this privilege and he can't stand it.

Francis sights, and then he gently hold Arthur's face in his hands, thinking that his companion seems to have become smaller. The other not only accepts the touch, rare occasion, but he himself fills the distance between their mouths, in a kiss that for the first time after months is neither violent nor desperate. It is long, passionate, absolutely slow, prelude to something deeper. Arthur's hands stretch out to catch Francis's shoulders to attire him, until he murmurs his own request in Francis's left ear. Voice trembles on the verge of crying.

To make love with Arthur, in its real meaning, is something too special to be done against the wall or, worse, on the floor of the bathroom. So, even if he knows Arthur protests and makes a fuss, Francis carries him "bride style" to bring him to their bedroom and place him gently on the bed, that squeaks for the new weight.

Arthur is strangely docile " it helps he finally stopped drugging with coffee " when he lets the other to undress him and he himself tries to undress his companion, goofily and still adorably; but Francis isn't in a hurry, neither he cares for the buttons of his shirt tore and thrown on the floor, or for the zip of the jeans that Arthur pulls down with excessive rush.

For Arthur sex plus blindness is a cocktail of elusive emotions, new and limpid like it was the first time. And, in a certain sense, it is. It's something quiet, but that deeply shakes him, while with an arm on the eyes for nothing but habit, he feels Francis' mouth on his groin. A clump twists in Arthur's stomach, inexplicable just with the simple warmth of his erection pulsing between legs. It is to give and

to receive, calm without delays, in a continuous to take and to be taken.

With face pressed against his companion's back, nostrils filled with his familiar smell, and hands tighten on his hips bone to hold them still, in cumming in him, Arthur dares to name that sensation in his low belly: bliss.

Satisfied, he poses his head on Francis' chest, moving a little until he finds the ideal position, with the other's arm around his abdomen, lazing in such tranquillity. He doesn't change his cynical vision of the future, because sex, however good, is not sufficient to cancel his demons. But it is enough to calm him, in half-sleep, with the thought that Francis hasn't left him, nor he seems inclined to do so.

And for the moment it is enough.

**\*\*Notes \*\***

I am not English native speaker, so please be kind for any mistakes.

In the story it isn't specified because it isn't fundamental, but characters move in a AU where countries and nations have different names and histories for ours. Like Lyra's earth in "His dark material". This is way I avoided specific references to nations, culture, and similar.

For the language of flowers I referred to "The secret language of flowers" by Vanessa Diffenbaugh.

End  
file.